

Councilmembers:

My name is Dana Ayebare and I am a student at Richard Montgomery High School. I am also co-lead organizer with Montgomery County Against Brutality (MCAB), a student-led campaign advocating for safety in schools without police presence and with wraparound services for students, families, and faculty. In the schools where we spend a significant amount of our developing years, we want to feel a strong sense of community and trust, and we want resources, facilities, and people that meet our needs. I offer this testimony on behalf of MCAB and MCPS students, including those who have co-signed below.

For the last several years, police presence in MCPS has continued to detract from real school safety. Numerous studies that circulated throughout the American public have shown that police presence in schools makes Black, Brown, and disabled students in particular feel criminalized and afraid, and that they do not prevent or deter violence. For the last several years, young people have been demanding that the Montgomery County Council remove police from our schools and invest in the necessary, non-punitive, measures that create real safety.

Since police were reintroduced in MCPS in 2022 in a process that excluded the voices of MCPS students, we as students have seen that they do not contribute to our wellbeing nor support the school community. We recognize the increases in wellness services, which we utilize when needed, but which are still insufficient in helping make schools safe, especially as we recover from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. We firmly believe that real safety for students will arise from redirecting at least half of the recommended FY24 budget for the CEO 2.0 program into:

- 1) Filling vacancies in social workers and mental health professionals, with the goal of achieving at least the National Association of School Psychologists' recommended student to school psychologist ratio: 500:1 in all of MCPS
- 2) Designating and providing wellness spaces
- 3) Increasing access to and awareness of resources, tools, and services provided by the Montgomery County Infants and Toddlers Program
- 4) Incorporating restorative justice practices in middle and high school curriculums, with resources including technical assistance, lessons, and/or workshops from professional restorative justice practitioners and educators centered around conflict resolution and building healthy relationships

and we urge the members of the Public Safety and Education and Culture Committees in particular to prioritize this as the Council decides on the Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budgets in the coming weeks.

MCPS and the County Council have the opportunity in the next school year and beyond to make significant strides towards creating a culture of safety in schools that has longevity, by employing creative solutions and compassion in budget decisions. Do the right thing by Montgomery County students: end the funding of school police and invest in real safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Dana Ayebare



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